

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1468

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to expand the Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs and to direct the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a study to assess certain mental health care resources of the Department of Veterans Affairs available to veterans who live in rural areas.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 29, 2021

Mr. TESTER (for himself and Mr. MORAN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to expand the Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs and to direct the Comptroller General of the United States to conduct a study to assess certain mental health care resources of the Department of Veterans Affairs available to veterans who live in rural areas.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Sgt. Ketchum Rural
3 Veterans Mental Health Act of 2021”.

4 **SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

5 In this Act:

6 (1) The term “covered mental health care”
7 means mental health care that is more intensive
8 than traditional outpatient therapy.

9 (2) The term “PRR center” means a psycho-
10 social rehabilitation and recovery center of the De-
11 partment of Veterans Affairs.

12 (3) The term “RANGE Program” means the
13 Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement
14 Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

15 (4) The term “rural veteran” means a veteran
16 who lives in a rural or highly rural area (including
17 such an area in a Tribal or insular area), as deter-
18 mined through the use of the Rural-Urban Com-
19 muting Areas coding system of the Department of
20 Agriculture.

21 **SEC. 3. EXPANSION OF RURAL ACCESS NETWORK FOR**
22 **GROWTH ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM OF THE**
23 **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

24 (a) EXPANSION.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
25 shall establish and maintain three new centers of the
26 RANGE Program.

1 (b) LOCATIONS.—The centers established under sub-
 2 section (a) shall be located in areas determined by the Sec-
 3 retary based on—

4 (1) the need for additional mental health care
 5 for rural veterans in such areas; and

6 (2) interest expressed by personnel at facilities
 7 of the Department of Veterans Affairs in such areas.

8 (c) TIMELINE.—The Secretary shall establish the
 9 centers under subsection (a) during fiscal year 2022.

10 (d) FUNDING.—There is authorized to be appro-
 11 priated to the Secretary \$1,200,000 for each of fiscal
 12 years 2022 through 2024 to carry out this section.

13 **SEC. 4. COMPTROLLER GENERAL STUDY ON MENTAL**
 14 **HEALTH CARE FURNISHED BY THE SEC-**
 15 **RETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO RURAL**
 16 **VETERANS.**

17 (a) STUDY REQUIRED.—

18 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Comptroller General of
 19 the United States shall conduct a study to assess
 20 whether the Department of Veterans Affairs has suf-
 21 ficient resources to serve rural veterans who need
 22 covered mental health care.

23 (2) ELEMENTS.—The study required under
 24 paragraph (1) shall include an assessment of—

1 (A) whether the mental health care fur-
2 nished by the Secretary through resources in-
3 cluding the RANGE Program, Enhanced
4 RANGE Program, mental health residential re-
5 habilitation treatment programs, inpatient men-
6 tal health services, and PRR centers is suffi-
7 cient to meet the covered mental health care
8 needs of rural veterans;

9 (B) how best to expand and to appro-
10 priately locate mental health resources de-
11 scribed in subparagraph (A);

12 (C) whether to require the establishment of
13 a PRR center at a medical facility of the De-
14 partment that serves 1,000 or more veterans
15 who are on the National Psychosis Registry;

16 (D) the demand by rural veterans for men-
17 tal health resources specified in subparagraph
18 (A);

19 (E) the average wait time for a rural vet-
20 eran for mental health resources specified in
21 subparagraph (A); and

22 (F) during the term of the study, how
23 many rural veterans died by suicide or overdose
24 while on a wait list for mental health resources
25 specified in subparagraph (A).

1 (b) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than 18 months
2 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comp-
3 troller General shall submit to the Committee on Veterans'
4 Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans 'Af-
5 fairs of the House of Representatives a report containing
6 the results of the study conducted under subsection (a).

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